

**Testimony of Freddie Christiansen, Chairman,  
Gulf of Alaska Coastal Communities Coalition  
to the Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries of the  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation,  
United States Senate, regarding implementation of the 1996 amendments  
to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, January 18, 2000**

Chair Snowe, Senator Stevens and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for holding your hearing in Alaska and providing a forum for our views on the 1996 amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

My name is Freddie Christiansen and I am the Chairman of the Gulf of Alaska Coastal Communities Coalition (GOACCC). The GOACCC is an alliance of more than thirty-five (35) communities stretching from Metlakatla in Southeast Alaska around Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet and Kodiak out to False Pass in the Aleutian Islands. Our purpose is to create fair and sustainable marine resource harvesting opportunities for smaller communities in the Gulf of Alaska. Our core values include the necessity of sustainable marine resource management. These are the same values that have been championed by you, Senator Stevens and others, in the passage of the Sustainable Fisheries Act.

In order to explain why many people in the Gulf of Alaska formed this coalition, I'd like to tell you a little about my personal experience. I have lived in Old Harbor all of my life and have been a commercial fisherman since I was (8) years old. From the implementation of the State's limited entry program for salmon in 1973, I have observed a continual decline in my community's opportunities to participate in fisheries. Our crab and shrimp fisheries were lost because of resource problems and the Individual Fishing Quota system restricted access to halibut and blackcod. As fishing jobs disappeared, Old Harbor experienced increased social problems, substance abuse, population declines and a sense of being cut off from our roots as a fishing community. Declining population impacts our schools and the opportunities for my children – fewer and fewer high school students remain in our village for high school or return to the village after attending high school elsewhere. As I traveled and talked with residents from other communities I discovered that their experiences paralleled mine. In fact, many communities have been almost entirely disconnected from fishing and resource related jobs. A number of residents of the Gulf formed the GOACCC to reconnect coastal communities with marine resources and to

encourage better and more equitable management of these resources.

Section 301(a)(8) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act states that “Conservation and management measures shall ... take into account the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities in order to (A) provide for the sustained participation of such communities, and (B) to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities.” The Coalition’s first initiative was founded on this directive.

Based on the letter of January 6, 2000, Subcommittee Chair Snowe and Committee Chairman McCain expressed their interest in views on community development quotas and other management alternatives. Although CDQs as they have been employed in the Bering Sea are not easily or practically transferred to the Gulf of Alaska, some form of community-based access to fisheries is an imperative if the small coastal communities are to remain viable into the future.

Last August, the Coalition submitted a proposal to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council to modify the IFQ program to permit community purchase, retention and fishing of halibut and sablefish IFQs. The concept was developed from the recommendations of the Ocean Studies Board of the National Academy of Sciences and National Research Council in their 1999 report to Congress called, “Sharing the Fish...Toward a National Policy on Individual Fishing Quotas.” The NRC Congressionally mandated report, consistent with the Magnuson- Stevens language, indicated that it had been an oversight not to allocate IFQs to communities when the program was started and recommended that regional councils, when designing IFQ programs, “should be allowed to allocate quota shares to communities ...” Most importantly, the report stated that “for existing IFQ programs, councils should be permitted to authorize the purchase, holding, management, and sale of IFQs by communities.”

We envision that nonprofit entities, such as community development foundations, would be formed to purchase, hold and manage quota share. These shares would be held in perpetuity as a community endowment and provide fishing access to halibut and sablefish for successive generations of community residents. We anticipate that there would be limits on the total amount of shares purchased by communities and the amount of

shares held by any single community. In addition there may be limitations on how many community quota shares any one individual will be able to fish.

Some have suggested that the anticipated increased funding for the Federal IFQ loan program through the 3% program fee assessment could help meet the needs in our communities. While this approach may be beneficial to some individuals in our communities, it does not address the larger community need to **permanently** have access to, and economic benefit from, marine resources. Individual owners can easily come and go from a community or simply sell their shares. In fact, the National Marine Fisheries Service reports that, in the first 4 years of the IFQ program, individuals living in rural Alaska have mostly sold their IFQ shares and, if the trend continues, coastal communities will eventually lose access to economic benefit from these resources. When a village skipper sells his IFQ shares, two or three additional families in the community lose income opportunities as crewmen. Community ownership of the IFQs would guarantee that the quota shares remain available to the community and that fishing jobs would remain available to community residents.

The Coalition's IFQ proposal is the first step along a path toward increased community benefit from marine resources. We seek your and your subcommittee's assistance, Senator Stowe, and your assistance, Senator Stevens, in the reauthorization of the Magnuson/Stevens Act to provide additional regulatory support for smaller, fisheries dependent, Gulf of Alaska communities.

Gulf of Alaska Coastal Communities are very concerned about the continuing high levels of bycatch and discards in several Gulf of Alaska fisheries and the habitat alterations occurring from "hard-on-bottom" trawling. This is especially true with the recent, substantial, decreases in halibut biomass estimates from the International Pacific Halibut Commission for the Gulf of Alaska and projected long term negative trends. Yet, relatively constant levels of halibut waste through bycatch continue to be authorized by the NPFMC. The GOACCC strongly urges the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council to aggressively implement the existing provisions of the Sustainable Fisheries Act to regulate applicable fisheries by requiring fishing methods that substantially reduce bycatch and habitat alteration.

In addition, the Coalition remains deeply concerned about Gulf of Alaska crab stocks. As you know,

there hasn't been a red king crab season in the Gulf since 1982 and no tanner crab season since 1994. Despite elimination of fishing – and even a reduction in the allowable subsistence harvest — Gulf of Alaska crab stocks remain severely depressed. More aggressive implementation of the 1996 amendments to Magnuson-Stevens and an increase in “essential” habitat protection in federal waters for our crab along with vigorous efforts at minimization of impacts on the essential habitat are called for.

Finally, we want to raise with the Subcommittee some perhaps unintended, but nevertheless detrimental, impacts of the National Marine Fisheries Service's newly instituted license limitation program (LLP) for the cod, pollock and flatfish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska. The program assured a significant number of larger vessels, particularly in the Western Gulf, that had marginal fishing histories while, at the same time, limiting new participation in these fisheries by coastal community residents. Moreover, the program limits the vessel size of participation and thus permanently vests the larger vessels with a competitive edge while prohibiting the natural evolution of improving fishing equipment for small boat fishermen. The LLP program is yet another barrier between residents of rural communities and the marine resources in proximity to where they live that is in need of attention.

In addition, the NPFMC recently awarded a species allocation of pacific codfish in the Bering Sea to a single gear type and is considering a parallel proposal for trawl fishermen in the Gulf. If the proposal is approved and a single gear type given a percentage of the Gulf of Alaska's pacific codfish quota, it will generate a frenzied scramble for all gear type to obtain specific allocations for all fisheries. This accomplishes much of the same result as an IFQ program — despite the current prohibitions against new IFQ programs in Magnuson-Stevens — and, despite the protective language for communities in Magnuson-Stevens. The LLP and the species allocations **do** **not** provide for the sustained participation of our communities and do not minimize adverse economic impacts on these communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about some of our concerns for the sustainability of fisheries dependent rural communities in the Gulf of Alaska and our desire to access the marine resources upon which they depend.

Every month, every year that passes without the overriding problem of access to fisheries adequately addressed moves some Gulf of Alaska coastal communities closer to extinction. Without a viable rural Alaska, something absolutely unique in the world will be lost, aside from the economic stimulus a vibrant rural Alaska means to the urban areas of Anchorage, Juneau, and Fairbanks. Once lost, it is not likely to ever be restored. Therefore, we seek your help and intervention in developing a lifeline to the future.

We are committed to working with your Subcommittee and anyone else to find sensible and feasible remedies to the challenges we face, some of which we have outlined in this testimony. The members of the GOACCC and the men, women and children (both Native and non-Native) whose lives and future way of life are linked to your work here today, will be deeply grateful to you for your commitment of time, energy and ingenuity to addressing the matters we have touched on in our testimony. Thank you.